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A Little Journey
to the Home of
**JOHN-B-
STETSON**
by Elbert Hubbard



EVERY
great In
stitution is the
Lengthened
Shadow *of* a
Single Man

E M E R S O N





JOHN B. STETSON

A Little Journey to the Home of
John B. Stetson



BY ELBERT HUBBARD



Done into a Printed Book by The Roycrofters, at Their
Shop, which is in East Aurora, New York, U. S. A.

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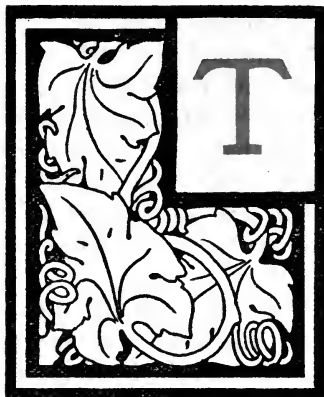
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3rd Edition

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STETSON THE MAN



HIS is the life-story of John B. Stetson, told in "tabloid."

Stetson was an American businessman.

¶ He is one of the moderns. I use the word "is," because the influence of a great personality never dies. The influence of the man is with us, and his soul goes marching on.

Stetson was a workingman. He became master of a trade at a time when this trade was a synonym for the shiftless, the unreliable, the erratic.

"Mad as a hatter," was a saying that

passed as legal tender in the current coin of language.

Lewis Carroll, in that very wise and foolish book entitled, "Alice in Wonderland," paid his respects to the mad hatter. Various other writers have done the same.

The old-time hatter, like the old-time printer, worked when he felt like it—and a good deal of the time he did not feel like it.

He was filled with the wanderlust, and to take off his apron and walk out without excuse or reason was, for him, a very natural thing to do.

¶ When the merry hatter received his pay and left the shop Saturday night, it was quite likely the shop did not see him until along about Tuesday or Wednesday, and then it took him the better part of a day to get his hand in.

It is probable that the particular trade of hatter has been maligned, for the fact is that one hundred years ago all the trades were very much on the same basis.

A Similar Case

JOHAN WESLEY in his "Journal" describes the condition of the potters in England, during his time. Half their earnings were spent for strong drink. None of them owned their homes. They lived in long lines of hovels, from which they were evicted when they lost their inclination or their capacity for work.

They were a brawling, bearbaiting, restless, shiftless, unreliable lot. They had no gardens, no flowers, no books, no pictures—no ambitions, no ideals. Very few of them could read and write. When they attended the meetings of John Wesley they often showed their appreciation by pelting the speaker with mud balls.

The places where they worked were sheds or small shops, managed by a man who lived over the factory, or alongside, and looked after his dozen workmen as best he could. The wares they made were mostly jugs for brewers.

As John Wesley rode his old horse, "Timothy," through this Cumberland potters' district one day, greatly to his surprise he saw a sight that caused him to rein in his horse and stop and stare. It was a flowerbed in front of a little house.

John Wesley dismounted, tied his horse to the fence, and went inside to investigate. That night he wrote in his Journal these words: "He is small and lame, but he loves flowers and his soul is near to God."

¶ The man of whom he wrote was Josiah Wedgwood, the founder of the town of Etruria, and who from making jugs for brewers evolved the art of making vases.

Incidentally, Wedgwood coined the word "Queensware," and made tableware of a sort and kind so that it came into general use among even the common people, taking the place of the old-time metal pot—from which each member of the household dipped and speared as suited his own inclination.

Wedgwood raised pottery from a trade to a fine art. In the process he became rich, and he made hundreds of other men rich. There is not a household in Christendom today where the marks of Wedgwood's genius are not shown.

The daughter of John Wedgwood became the mother of Charles Darwin. Darwin has changed the thinking complexion of the world; but even Darwin, who was an innovator, did not do more for humanity than did Josiah Wedgwood.

John B. Stetson did for the hatter's trade what Wedgwood had done for the potter's.

Stetson made of his trade a business, a profession, a science, an art. He did the thing better than it had ever been done before since history began.

He was an economist, an organizer and a humanitarian. Incidentally, he became rich, and he made thousands of other people rich. He evolved distinct styles, and he made his name synonymous with the thing he manufactured.

The Word Stetson

THE word "Stetson" has passed into the current coin of expression. If a man asks for a "Stetson" in any civilized country in the world, the dealer knows what he wants; and will possibly try to pass him out "something just as good." Wherever hats are mentioned and discussed for even five minutes the word "Stetson" is used. If a man wants to express the supreme excellence of a hat he tells his customer, "It is a Stetson," or "Just as good as a Stetson," or "Exactly like a Stetson."

But no dealer, even in his wildest imaginings, describes the hat he offers as better than a "Stetson." The "Stetson" is the standard. It stands for beauty, durability, efficiency, and all that is worth while in the line of hats. It "looks" and it lasts.

Stetson made the business of hatting respectable.

The Evolution of the Factory

JOHN B. STETSON was born in Orange, New Jersey, in Eighteen Hundred Thirty. He died in Nineteen Hundred Six. His was a life of constant activity. He ran the gamut from poverty and hardship to wealth.

His father was an employing hatter, and a successful one according to the standard of the times. Stephen Stetson lived over his shop and worked at his trade in the good old-time way. It was an age of handicrafts •••

All manufacturing was once done in the homes. The entire family worked at the business, and the trade was passed along—whatever it was—from father to son. The sons, the daughters and the mother all worked, too, at the business. Spinning, weaving, glass-blowing,

wood-carving, and the making of lead-pencils, cutlery and utensils of every kind and sort were done in the homes.

Each of the great factories of New England can be traced back to its rise when by the kitchen stove the master of the house worked out an idea which took form in a commodity that was supplied to his neighbors, being traded to them for something they themselves made *so so*.

Business was barter. Perhaps once a year the manufacturer took a load of his wares to the neighboring fair, and there in his booth sold enough to buy raw stock for a year.

These were the methods continued from ancient times down to the invention of the steam-engine, and for a good many years after the invention of the steam-engine the methods of the home handicrafts still survived.

The complete separation of the home from the factory is a thing which the modern man has seen evolved. Men in middle life now can remember a day when the principal merchant in every town and village lived over his store, shop or factory.

Stetson the Elder

STEPHEN STETSON was making money, for he had centered on that one thing. He lived in New Jersey, but he had the true New England instincts. He saved, and saved eternally. He worked and he compelled every one else to work, and in his life there were very few play-spells.

When he had accumulated fifty thousand dollars he was accounted one of the richest men in the business. He was fifty years old, and he decided he would retire from business and enjoy himself—not knowing that happiness is a habit, and if you do not get your happiness out of your work you will never know what happiness is.

He did not realize that to retire from work is to retire from life; so he sold out his prosperous business, and the money he had made in a business he understood, he invested in one he knew nothing about.

¶ And the result was that his investments which he had expected would bring him in ten per cent or more without effort, melted away

into thin air. ¶ Andrew Carnegie's maxim, "Put all your eggs in one basket and then watch that basket," had not then been expressed. The business that prospers is the business that is managed by the men who built it up.

The elder Stetson passed away, whipped out, discouraged, a bankrupt man, and his sons took in hand the raveled shreds of his business and endeavored to build it up.

Hardship and Ill Health

JOHN B. was one of the younger children, and the older ones, filled with the thought of primogeniture, naturally took charge.

¶ His father had taught him the trade. But education outside of one's trade among the hatters was then regarded as quite superfluous, so the lad never attended school a day in his life. His mother taught him to read and write, and being possessed of a hungry mind he acquired knowledge as the days passed. Life was his school. John B. Stetson was working for an older brother by the day. He made hats, taught others how, sold the product, bought the raw stock—and the brother absorbed the profits and the honors.

So we find the brothers separating, and John B. making arrangements to start a business of his own. Then calamity came in the way of ill health. The doctors said John B. Stetson had consumption and that his days on earth were few. He was slight, slim, slender, nervous, active, and the type of person who goes quick—or lasts long, as the case may be.

But John B. Stetson was not to die just then. He studied his own case and he came to the conclusion that he would have to quit the exacting business of making hats and get out in the open.

He struck out for the Far West, which then, in the late Fifties, meant Illinois.

Fever and ague were then the one crop of the Middle West. There were not trees enough to absorb the humidity, and the overturned sod created a miasma, and this transformed the prairies into a Campagna of "shakes" similar to that which surrounded Rome.

¶ Stetson shook, and shook dice with Destiny. He was burned with

fever and chilled with cold, but he had no intention of going back East. If he was going to die, he would die in the West, and he pushed on across the Mississippi River, through to the rising city of Saint Joseph, Missouri.

Saint Joseph was a trading-post where parties fitted out for Pike's Peak—seven hundred fifty miles away.

At Saint Joseph, Stetson worked in a brickyard; then he became manager of the brickyard, then part owner. Clay was plentiful, and wood was to be had for the cutting. He made money and invested it all in the business.

His brickyard was on the banks of the Missouri. He had made up half a million bricks all ready to burn, arches complete and filled with wood, fires started, when lo! the fickle and finicky Missouri River went on a rampage, overflowed its banks, rose and kept rising, until it drove the firemen out of Stetson's brickyards.

The water still kept rising.

It put out the fires, undermined the arches, and the bricks made without straw tumbled in a mass.

Soon they were a heap of mud, which the yellow waters of the Missouri dissolved.

Stetson's fortune, the result of two years of hard work, swirled and swam away to the South. Stetson stood on a hilltop and said: "Let 'er go! I am not the first man who has made a fortune and lost it!"

¶ The Civil War was on, and Stetson tried to enlist, but his physical disabilities were too apparent and he was rejected.

There was a party fitting out for Pike's Peak, and Stetson was invited to become one of the members. He accepted the invitation and they started away on foot, a dozen young men headed for the Rocky Mountains.

Stetson's health was still precarious. His risk, as the insurance men would say, was a hazardous one.

In any event, however, he would not be a care to society. If he died, he would simply drop in his tracks and a shallow grave would be scooped out on the prairie and there he would rest in his last,

long sleep. ¶ It was June and the rosinweed rose as high as a man's head, across the prairies. Clouds of wild ducks circled over the ponds. The prairie-chickens drummed on the little hilltops. The blue cranes threw out their sentinels, strutted and called.

Nature was at her loveliest and best.

And so these young men tramped, following the trail to the West, always to the West, and as they journeyed, health and happiness came back to John B. Stetson.

An Object-Lesson

WHEN John B. Stetson started for Pike's Peak, his baggage consisted of the clothes upon his back, a shotgun and a hatchet. His companions, a dozen or so in number, were similarly equipped.

Science, with all its wonderful discoveries, has not devised a better method for eradicating the Great White Plague than that used by Stetson. It was out of doors all the time, under the blue sky, in wind and weather; but best of all there was a purpose, an objective point. They were going somewhere. There was plenty of good-cheer and banter, and so they walked.

But the storms came, and the plains and the prairies were wind-swept. At night they had no shelter.

In this extremity they resorted to a plan of sewing the skins of animals together; muskrat, rabbits, beaver, coyote, were plentiful, but our friends had no method of tanning the skins, and there is a certain, serious objection to using green skins for clothing purposes in the Summertime, that need not here be cited.

Shelter-tents, just big enough to crawl into, were easy enough to make with the help of skins. But these skins were thrown away when the sun came out, and the hope and prayer was that the storms would not again come.

Then it was that Stetson showed his companions an object-lesson in science one fine day as they were sitting on the bank of the stream with their feet dabbling in the water. The thing that Stetson explained to his friends was something they had never heard of, and

at once it caused a big argument. Things people have never heard of they usually denounce as impossible. And while they are saying that this thing can never be done, some fellow just goes ahead and does it!

The question turned on securing cloth for shelter-tents. One man made the flat, dogmatic statement that cloth was made by weaving, and that it could not be made in any other way.

Stetson stood out that there was another scheme for making cloth.

¶ All the others denounced him and voted him a theorist; so, to prove his case, Stetson expounded to them the science of felting.

¶ This is a branch of knowledge that is as old as glass-making. It goes back to the time of Moses, who led the Children of Israel out of captivity fifteen centuries before Christ. It was known to Homer and Hesiod, for they mention the scheme in their writings. Pythagoras, six hundred years before Christ, made cloth by the felting process, and as far as we know, the first fabrics were made of felt, and weaving came in as an afterthought.

And the world does not yet understand the science of felting, any more than it understands the science of electricity or the making of concrete. All we know is that the thing can be done.

Stetson explained these facts to his friends and received the merry ha-ha, and the doubtful te-he by way of applause. Now here is a story that was told me for fact, but when I once asked Stetson about it, he only laughed and said I should not believe half I heard. However, I still believe the tale is sure enough true, and so I give it, nothing extenuating and setting down naught in malice. So here goes: Stetson took some of the skins that his friends had discarded, sharpened up his hatchet on a convenient stone, and shaved the fur off the skins.

He then cut a bit of a hickory sapling; sliced off a thong from one of the skins, and made a hunter's bow. With this bow he agitated the fur so as to keep it in a regular little cloud in the air.

Here is a process known to all old-time hatters, but which can only be done by an expert. It requires about as much talent and skill to

manipulate a hunter's bow as it does to play the violin. Nowadays the fur is manipulated by a machine fan and allowed to settle, but the principle is the same.

Stetson kept the fur in the air, and then it fell gently by its own weight, and was very naturally distributed over a certain space. As it fell, Stetson, with mouth full of water, after the manner of John Chinaman, blew a fine spray of moisture through the fur. Soon there was a mat of fur that could be lifted up and rolled. It was like a thin sheet of wet paper.

There was a campfire near, and a pot of boiling water, and into this boiling water Stetson dipped his sheet of matted fur.

It began to shrink.

By manipulating it with his hands, and rapidly dipping it in the hot water, he soon had a little blanket, woven soft and even of perfect cloth.

¶ The argument that the thing could not be done faded away into the nothingness. Nobody said, "I told you so!"

There was the actual thing—cloth made by the felting process—one of the oldest devices of the human mind.

It was only recently that the microscope showed us that hair and fur are not made up of straight, reedlike strands, but that every individual hair is covered with small hooks, branches or prongs, and that when stimulated by hot water these prongs show a great tendency to cling to each other and will crawl or creep on after the manner of "tickle-grass." And the youngster who does not know about tickle-grass is to be pitied.

In the good old times when I went to the little red schoolhouse arrayed simply in two garments, a runabout and trousers buttoned thereto, tickle-grass came in as a scientific wonder. You simply started the thing up your trouser-leg and it came out at your collar, or where your collar should have been.

The First "Stetson"

THE principle of the single strand of fur is exactly the same as that of the tickle-grass. But the tickle-grass we see with our wide-open eyes, and the other is only manifest by the use of the

microscope. The shrinking of felt is caused by the fibers interlocking, seizing upon each other and creeping close. It is a form of physical affinity. Just why it is so we do not know, but the fact remains. Cotton does not shrink or creep, because it has n't the feet.

And the story goes that Stetson's traveling companions were so delighted with his experiment that they immediately went to work killing jack-rabbits, beavers and skunks and any other of the fur-bearing animals they could get. Then under Stetson's directions they made felt tents that effectually turned the water, to the delight and astonishment of the troopers on horseback and afoot, and in the prairie-schooners, that were wending their way to the West.

Hats then were more or less of a luxury. Indians got along quite well without hats. So did our friends in the pioneer days.

In Winter, the Davy Crockett fashion was in vogue.

The coonskin cap, with its dangling tail, was picturesque and serviceable, but in Summertime it certainly had its disadvantages in way of moths and fleas. If you left your cap unguarded, some hungry dog would probably carry it off. To amuse his friends, Stetson made a hat out of the felt. It was big and picturesque. It protected the wearer from the wind and rain, as well as from the scorching sun.

¶ Besides all this, it attracted considerable attention. It made the wearer the object of envy, ridicule or admiration, as the case may be. But the ribald ones ceased to revile when a bullwhacker on horseback, gaily seated on a silver-mounted saddle from Mexico, looked upon Stetson's hat with envious eyes and then offered the owner a five-dollar gold-piece for it.

This was the first genuine Stetson hat made and sold.

That it would eventually lead up to a great industry, no one guessed; but it was the germ of an enterprise that was to be worldwide in its influence.

Life is Life

THE little band of pioneers reached Pike's Peak, and discovered that life is life wherever you go, and that about all you have is what you carry with you.

A few of those Western miners made money. Some left their bones along the winding way; others died in the diggings. Most of them gambled and wasted their substance, whenever they had any. ¶ Brigham Young's advice to the Mormons was: "Raise vegetables and feed the miners, and you will all grow rich. If you mine for gold a very few of you will make money, but the most of you will die in poverty."

A year passed, and health and strength had come back to Stetson. He was big and strong, able and ambitious—full of ideas. He decided that he would go back to the East—back to the city that Benjamin Franklin had done so much to make. There he would work out his dream and, if possible, build up a business.

He could do this one thing. He was a feltmaker and a hatter. He had the skill of fingers and the talent to do. And so back to Philadelphia he went, with his scanty earnings made in the diggings.

Trials and Difficulties

REACHING Philadelphia, he had one hundred dollars left. He bought the tools of his trade, rented a little room at Seventh and Callowhill Streets, and started to work making hats. To buy the fur and make the felt was the first thing to do.

Stetson had no credit, but ten dollars' worth of fur was all that was required to start.

He studied the fashions that were in vogue, and made the sort of hat that seemed to be in demand. He peddled these out at the stores of the dealers, one, two, three, half a dozen at a time.

He saw, however, that if he simply made hats like those that others were making, working only to duplicate these, he would be but a molecule in the mass. He wanted to do something different—to start a style. And so he made a hat slightly different from that worn by the fashionables. Putting one of these on his head he walked around from dealer to dealer, doffing his hat and telling them he could duplicate it.

The dealers smiled in derision, saying that fashions came from across the sea, and that to start a new one was not to be thought of.

Then he went back to his shop and ironed an extra curl to the brim, gave the hat a new twist and started out again. He was going to meet the prejudices of the dealers. Again he was forced to return, unsuccessful. Over and over again he endeavored to start his new fashion.

¶ Finally, one day, he went out wearing a hat made of very fine, soft felt. He had made this hat from the finest fur that he could procure, and his endeavor was to make the lightest hat possible. A felt hat weighs anywhere from two to four ounces. This hat that Stetson wore weighed two. Stetson gave a vicious curl to his moustache and a cock that matched to the hat, and twisting his hat over one eye, he started again on his rounds among the dealers.

He assumed a rowdy, Beau Brummel appearance, aping the ultra-fashionables, and as he swaggered into a store his dapper appearance got the attention of a customer who eyed him with approval.

¶ Stetson took off his hat and showed it to the dealer in the presence of the customer who stood by. The customer became interested and bought the hat on the spot. The dealer gave Stetson an order for a dozen.

This was the first order for a dozen hats that he had received, and he had been working the market for six months.

He hastened back to his shop, took all the money he had, went out and bought the finest fur that he could procure, and started to fill the order ☛ ☛

From this time on he had plenty of work. The margins, however, were very close. Customers would not pay more than two dollars for a hat, and they said that this was such a little one anyway, that it was not worth more.

Every Monday morning Stetson bought ten dollars' worth of fur. The fur came in batches and was carried up the creaking stairways by a lusty Irishman who flopped the bale upon the floor and waited stolidly for his money. The mail during the week brought enough to pay for the fur, but barely enough, and one Monday morning when Stetson opened the last letter that had come to him, he discovered that he had not enough money to pay for the bale of fur

that would soon arrive. He knew the Irishman was on the way with his wheelbarrow. Soon he would have to make the humiliating confession that he could not pay. What to do was the thing he was revolving in his mind.

He heard the man come up the stairs. He saw him enter with the load upon his shoulders. The Irishman gave the bale a toss and it fell with a thud to the floor, raising a cloud of dust. And as it fell, the Irishman remarked in a hot-mush brogue: "The ould man says that yez need n't moind about sinding the money for a week or so. Jes' suit yersilf."

And then the son of Hibernia disappeared down the stairway. Stetson sat dumb with surprise; and tears ran down his cheeks. From that day forward he was a believer in what our friend Socrates called the "Demon." Some call it "Providence," others call it "Luck." Stetson never formulated it, but the belief was always his that God was on his side, and that whatever he did would prove to be right and proper and best; that no matter how dark the clouds, light would break through.

This compelling faith in himself and in destiny never forsook him in all his long career.

The Big Idea

IT was only a few days after his receiving credit without asking for it, that he decided to stake his all on a venture that no hatter had before attempted. The bullwhacker on the plains who had separated himself from a five-dollar gold-piece for a very crude kind of hat, rose before him like an apparition. Instead of depending upon the local trade of the hatters of Philadelphia and haggling with them as to prices, Stetson decided to take all the money he had and make a big, fine, picturesque hat for the Cattle Kings.

He would call his hat "The Boss of the Plains."

He had gotten a list of the clothing and hat dealers in every city and town of the Southwest, and he would send each of these one of his big hats with a letter asking for an order for a dozen!

This would either make or break him, but he believed that destiny

was with him. So he spent all his money for material and then ran in debt to the very limit of his credit. He made his big, natural-colored hats, four-inch brim and four-inch top, with a strap for a band—and out went the hat to the West by express or by mail.

Whether the hat, or orders, would ever come back was the question. Two weeks passed and the orders were coming, "Send a dozen hats just like the sample." Some of the men sent cash with their orders, saying that they wanted their orders given the preference.

This gave Stetson a clew. He sent out more samples as fast as he could, making the suggestion that if a man wanted his hats by return express, he should send the money in advance.

This new hat, "The Boss of the Plains," was made of one-grade material and retailed at five dollars; then in finer material to sell for ten dollars; then in extra-fine fur made from pure beaver or nutria. These hats sold for as much as thirty dollars apiece. Money came, and the orders were piling up.

From this time on the story of the business of John B. Stetson reads like a romance. No tale of the imagination written by Sir Walter Scott equals it. Stetson did things that Sir Walter could never even imagine. He introduced initiative into the business. Stetson was a creator, a dealer, a scout of civilization.

He marched always in the vanguard, and he introduced patterns which, seemingly, can not be improved on today.

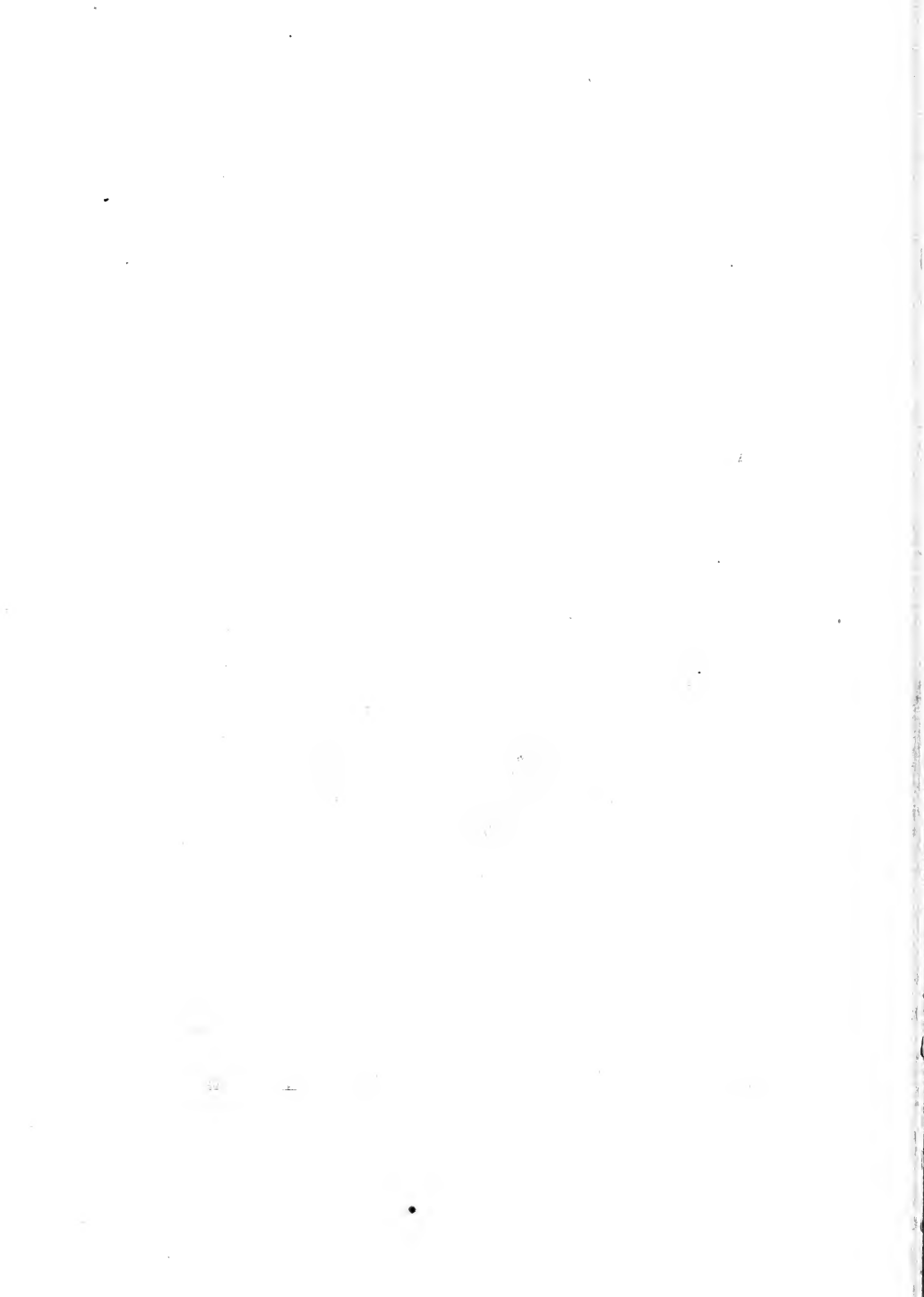
The great business of the John B. Stetson Company has doubled in volume since his death. But the increase has all been by a close application to the methods laid down by the dead chief. Being dead he yet lives.

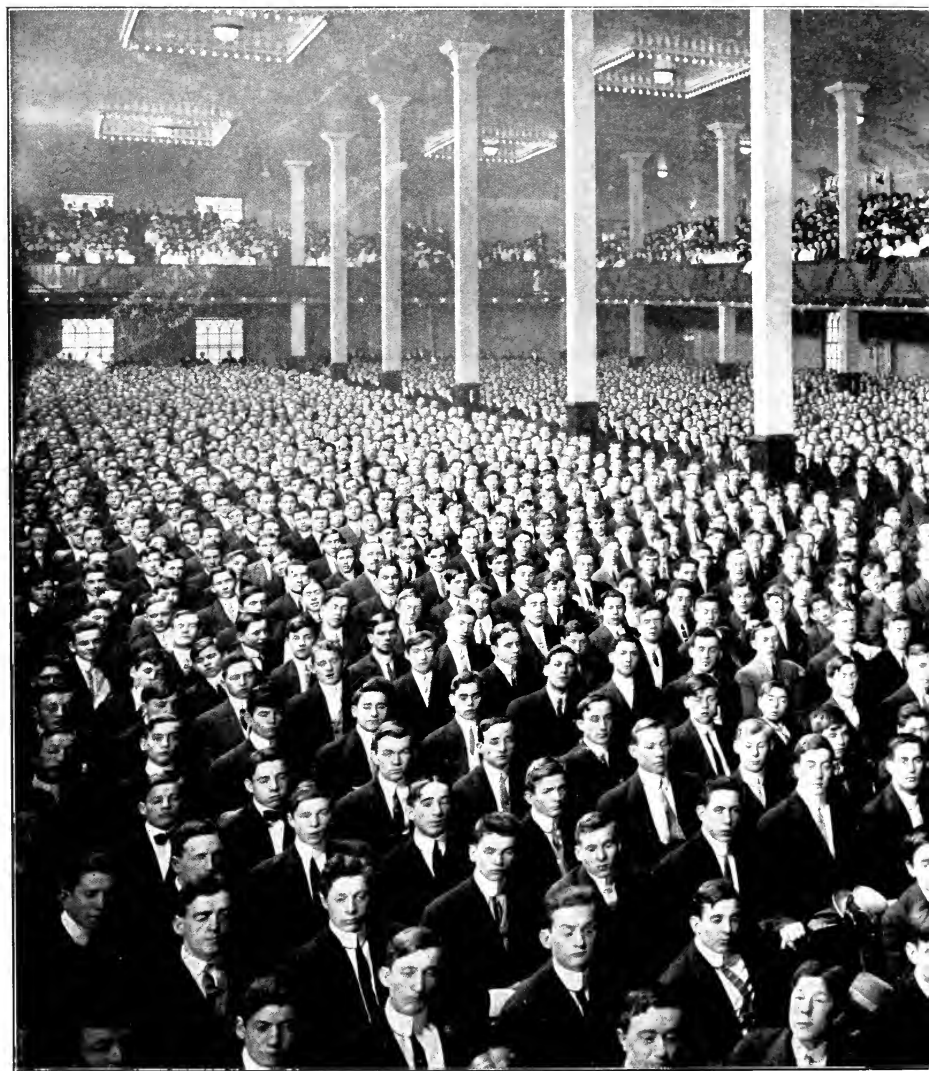
The Growing West

WHEN a thing is known it ceases to be either deep, strange or profound.

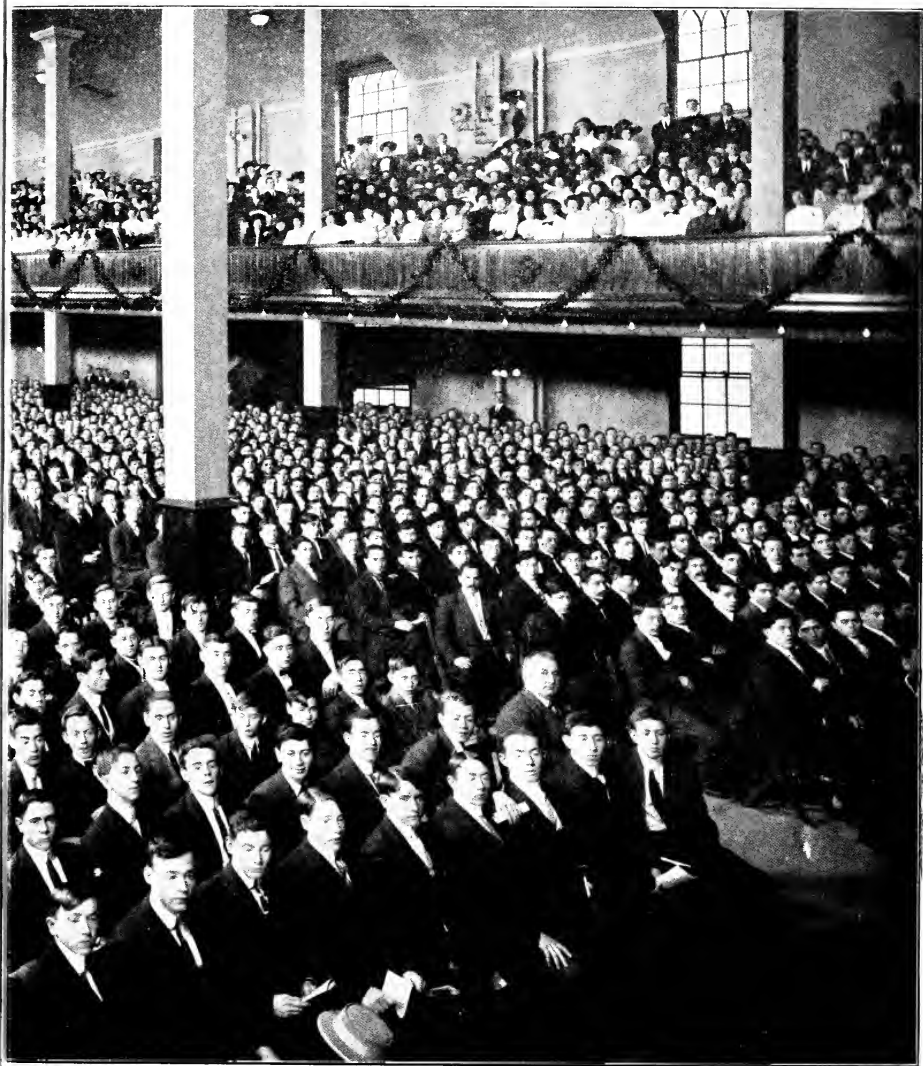
But we wonder why, when Stetson sold his first, big, picturesque hat there on the plains of Colorado, the thought did not at once come to him that there was a market for such wares!

The fact was that pioneers were poor. Hats were more or less of a





CHRISTMAS MEETING



STETSON EMPLOYEES

luxury, and the possibilities of the West were to Stetson absolutely unguessed, just as they were to Napoleon when he sold that whole vast territory for a fraction of a cent per acre. It is doubtful whether forty or so years ago any living man imagined the extent of the wealth that now exists in America. Stetson did not know that there was even then a growing class of Western aristocrats, men immensely wealthy from the sale of cattle, who were coming into power.

When we are in the midst of a thing we do not see it. Perspective is necessary; and the thought of supplying a distinctive hat for the aristocrats of the West did not come to him until a certain fateful day in Philadelphia, when he had tried everything else and only saw hardship ahead.

Stetson could always remember the exact time and spot when it came over him that he could get away absolutely from competition by making a hat for the cattle kings. The name, "Boss of the Plains," seized upon him, and to supply this market became the one controlling object of his life. He actually became fevered over it. Subsequent events proved the truth of his prophecy.

A Man of Faith

STETSON was distinctly a religious man in the highest sense. His love for his work and his workers was absorbing, and his faith was the guiding star of his life. This gave him courage and good-cheer, even in the face of seeming disaster. He knew that all would be well. His firm faith in the Good was a strong factor in his success.

The hat known as the "B. O. P." was a modified Mexican sombrero. It was a sombrero with a college education. The limit of Stetson's business from this on was his ability to manufacture.

From making one style he began to make many. The vogue spread, and it became a fixed fact to the man of the West that for service and utility, and to the man of the East that for style, he must wear a "Stetson." A "Stetson" stands for success. Stetson's faith was contagious.

So far as I know, no great business was ever built up equal in volume to this with such a minimum of advertising. Our scientific friends tell us that advertising is an economic waste. This is certainly true. Advertising is telling who you are, what you are, where you are and what you have to offer the world in the way of service or commodity. The only man who should not advertise is the man who has nothing to offer.

At the same time, there is no finer way in the world to waste money than in advertising. Very few advertisers indeed know how much of a return they are getting.

Stetson was the first man to say, "There is no advertisement equal to a well-pleased customer." He endeavored to make a hat which would so please the customer that he would show it and explain to others where he got it. The Stetson hat in looks and wear proved its worth to the wearer and his friends, and the trademark which Stetson was proud to put in it told the name of the maker and where he lived. Thus every man who wore a "Stetson" was an advertising agent for John B. Stetson.

The Hat as a Symbol

I SUPPOSE it need not be explained that a hat is not concealed on the person. It surmounts a man's dome of thought. It occupies the proudest position in all that goes to make up his haberdashery and toggery. In togs the hat certainly occupies first place. The hat is a sort of modified crown. There is a certain tendency in the human heart which prompts the individual to show his social status in his hat. The hat reveals the mood of mind which the individual possesses.

We bestow honors by touching the hat-brim or lifting the hat. Thus we symbol our mental attitude toward an individual. There are people before whom we stand uncovered, and there are others in the presence of whom we stolidly pull our hat down.

William Penn was born with his hat on and never removed it, even in the presence of royalty. Thus did he manifest his ego. And from Beau Brummel, who wore a towering hat with a dinky brim, we

run the hat gamut to George Fox, who reached equilibrium in breadth of brim. On Beau Brummel's hat was a fluttering flummery of ribbons of various hues, but the hat worn by George Fox was absolutely without ornament. The Mexican will ride out from his hacienda on a ten-dollar horse and a one-hundred-dollar saddle, wearing a forty-dollar hat and a three-dollar suit of clothes.

The thing that got the eye of the American cattle king was size, simplicity, quality, individuality—something that was unique and genuine ~~so so~~

Stetson, instead of advertising his hats or sending out traveling men, shipped a sample hat by express to every dealer. Later on, he discovered that the men in a town he sold attracted to themselves pretty much of the hat trade.

The hats for which Stetson received orders when they reached the dealer usually proved to be a little better article than the man expected. Stetson aimed to disappoint his customers on this side. If there were any surprises, he surprised the man by giving him a better hat than he expected. And I heard the designer of today say, "Any hat, moth-eaten or defective, is good enough for a sample, but none is too perfect for a merchant to sell or a man to wear." And the merchant and the wearer know that the hat they buy will be up to the Stetson Standard, regardless of the sample ~~so~~. Stetson disarmed criticism by absolute honesty, absolute integrity; and so far as I have been able to learn, he was the first hatter to adopt the one-price system and refuse to sell any dealer who cut or jockeyed prices.

In less than a year after Stetson began to make the hat known as the "Boss of the Plains," he gave up the Philadelphia local trade entirely, and in the interests of economy moved from the business district to Fourth Street and Montgomery Avenue, three miles out. He was clear in the suburbs of the city. The wise ones said that no man could do business so far out of town; others said the land he bought was not worth the money. But the days went by, as the days do, and now the Stetson factory is practically in the middle of the

city, and a great deal of the most valuable real estate is still beyond the Stetson works. It became an axiom in the minds of the people who knew Stetson that wherever he bought real estate prosperity would follow.

The Idea Expands

WHEN the Stetson factory was built in the suburbs, it was a three-story building one hundred feet long and thirty feet wide. It was beyond the needs of the concern, but Stetson's prophetic vision saw it filled with happy, prosperous and intelligent workers. ¶ The first thing to do was to transform the shiftless, indifferent, impulsive, drinking, tramp hatter into a reliable and earnest individual. ¶ It was discovered that the men who were saving money soon evolved a degree of integrity and intelligence which the tramp hatter did not possess. Some of the men planned for building homes. This idea grew and from it sprang the Stetson Building and Loan Association. ¶ If Philadelphia is "The City of Homes," Stetson made use of the favorable local conditions to encourage his men to build or to buy homes of their own, and in the years of growth of the business, this idea, worked out through the Building and Loan Association, developed to such an extent that a large portion of the Stetson employees became householders in their own right. These homes were so numerous and so attractive in their varied styles that they drew the attention of the United States Government, and the Bureau of Labor made a special study of the results of the operation of the Stetson Building and Loan Association, displaying facts and figures with numerous pictures of houses in an exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition.

The apprentice system adopted by Stetson was absolutely unique. He paid the beginner a fair wage, with an understanding that if the boy remained during the apprentice period he would receive a fixed bonus for every week he worked. Here was a chance to learn a trade and secure a snug saving at the same time. It was a master-stroke in binding to him able and reliable men. This idea grew and was worked out later in all departments in a big way

Today all the employees in the great factory, in which fifty-five hundred people are working, are sharing in the profits of the business through a system of bonuses. Starting many years ago, Stetson offered on Christmas a small bonus to be paid the next Christmas to those men who worked continuously and faithfully throughout the year. While, the first year, not a large percentage of the men earned the bonus, the result was sufficiently satisfactory to induce the offering of a larger bonus the following year and the extension of the plan to the workers in other departments. The bonus is in some departments as high as twenty per cent, so that the employee who has earned during the year one thousand dollars receives two hundred as a substantial Christmas reminder of his share in the prosperity of the business.

When last Christmas I saw fifty-five hundred happy workers gather in the great Stetson auditorium, all singing heartily in the intervals of receiving their bonuses, it was clear that Stetson had made life worth while.

A Friend to All

THE secret of the success of John B. Stetson turned first on meeting the market with a quality and style of hat such as was in demand. The next thing was managing the workmen so as to evolve about him a big Stetson family, a family of happy, healthy, effective workers.

A JOURNEY TO THE HOME OF JOHN B. STETSON is no misnomer for a visit to the Stetson factory. Stetson so thoroughly identified himself with the life as well as the work of the factory that it may well be called his home.

Stetson was on friendly terms with all his people; called them by their first names; shook hands with them when they met; took a friendly interest in their affairs.

When the gathering of physical years came upon him and the multiplied number of employees made it impossible longer to continue the personal contact with each, he still maintained his general interest and activity.

He was always a stickler for fresh air and sunshine. This idea had been impressed upon him in a tragic way through his close call from death by tuberculosis. Always he loved the sunshine. His offices and factory were flooded with light. He urged his people when they built houses to build facing the South and the East, and was often on hand to suggest, advise and encourage.

John B. Stetson was too busy to go to a doctor, so when need arose his physician came to see him in his own office. Thinking of others, Stetson got the habit of bringing in such of his employees as needed treatment. This idea, like all of his, enlarged. His own physician's services were outgrown. Specialists in various lines were called in. A day came when Stetson found that if he was to have an office to call his own that was not a clinic and dispensary he must make other arrangements. And he built a hospital.

Nor would he confine this to the relief of his employees only. Its benefits were free to all. Twice has the work of the hospital outgrown its building equipment, and today a modern building with a staff of thirty physicians and unsurpassed facilities is ever ready to cure or relieve the ills not only of the workers in the Stetson factory but of the community surrounding it.

The prevention of illness has been even more effective. No expense in building and sanitation has been spared to make workrooms comfortable and healthful. The history of the business has been a constant succession of tearing down old structures and building new to secure the maximum of light and air. Figures show the result. The Secretary of the Beneficial Association pointed out to me that, while years ago to meet the sick and death benefits an occasional extra assessment was necessary in addition to the regular monthly dues, no such assessment has been made in the past seven years. From the regular dues a surplus has accumulated, so that these dues are now frequently passed. Through sanitation and careful filtration of water, typhoid has practically disappeared and tuberculosis is no longer the hatters' bugbear.

And through this unselfish—or if you please to call it, selfish—

interest in his workers, the tramp hatter disappeared from the Stetson factory and there grew up a big band of healthy, strong, intelligent people.

Then came in organization, a division of labor, with department heads, and these department heads were his marshals. They were paid a goodly wage and given an interest in the business.

No employer of labor ever got a more loyal service from his helpers than did John B. Stetson. The Stetson people, instead of planning or scheming for ease and how they could get out of work, turned their attention to helping the factory. They felt they were part of the concern, and to cheat the institution was to cheat themselves.

¶ The employer who can bring to bear this consciousness in the mind of the worker has achieved a great victory over human inertia.

¶ Stetson believed in his people and they believed in him. He diffused an atmosphere of good-cheer, of ambition, wherever he went. His business grew and he grew with the business.

Growing Rich by Giving

STETSON was always giving money, but he took good pains not to give so as to pauperize the individual. The amount of money he gave away no man can compute, for he kept no record of it himself and did not remember it, but like all men who give much he was occasionally victimized.

He made it a habit whenever there was an increase in the family of one of his workers to send congratulations, and at the same time a substantial recognition. He loved babies. He doted on children. He would often go out of his way across the street to pat some youngster on the head and give him a quarter. The children would follow him in the streets and call him by name, and sometimes he would carry a baby in his arms to relieve a tired mother.

It grew to be a custom that when a baby in the family of his workers was a year old the mother would come around to the factory and show her darling to the chief. No matter how busy he was he would go out into the hallway and greet such a mother, and the rule was to give her a dollar and wish her happiness.

Attached to his office in later years was a big waiting-room, and in this room every forenoon was a goodly group of callers who came for their blessing, and a bit anxious for the substantial part of it. Stetson would go out from time to time and clean out the room by shaking hands with everybody and starting them all on their way. There were occasional repeaters, but Stetson overlooked little things like that. He never sent any one hungry and empty-handed away ☞ ☞

On one occasion a woman with a baby in a shawl appeared as usual. Stetson shook hands with her, patted the baby on the head, gave her a dollar and started her off down the stairs.

In about fifteen minutes another woman appeared with a like youngster in her arms. Stetson was intuitive. His was the feminine mind. He simply knew things because he knew. This time, without thinking, he said to the woman, "Have n't I seen you here before?"

¶ And the woman said, "No."

He followed up the question with another, "Were you not in here an hour ago or less?" Then he said, "I have seen this baby before."

¶ The woman, abashed, admitted that she had borrowed the baby from her neighbor.

Stetson never blamed anybody for anything, except laziness, not even for lying. He used to say, "Nothing but the truth pays."

Yet censure was not in his heart. He never converted himself into a section of the Day of Judgment. He heard the woman's confession that she had borrowed the baby. Then he laughed, shook hands with her, gave her the dollar, and said, "Go off now, and when you come back here again bring a baby of your own."

A Builder and a Creator

MAN, like Deity, creates in his own image. When a painter paints a portrait he makes two—one of himself and one of the sitter. ¶ If there is a sleazy thread in your character you will weave it into the fabric you are making.

A Stetson hat was a bit of Stetson character.

Stetson hats looked like Stetson—they were unconventional,

natural, generous, genuine. They reacted, too, on the wearer. ¶ The word "Stetson" not only stood for hat, but for a certain style of hat, and a certain type of man. No cheap, apologetic, sneakerino tightwad ever wore a Stetson—it would n't fit him.

Stetson stood for The American Philosophy, devised by people who live on the Fortieth Parallel in America.

This philosophy reduced to its simplest terms means work, love, laughter, study and play, mixed in right proportion and taken ad lib.

¶ Stetson believed that only the busy person is happy, and that systematic, daily, useful work is man's greatest blessing.

"This country is built on business," said Stetson.

We are a nation of workers, builders, inventors, creators, producers.

¶ We are the richest country, per capita, in the world; and our wealth has all come from the farm, the forest, the factory, the mine, the sea.

¶ We have dug, plowed, pumped, smelted, refined, transported and manufactured. We did not inherit our wealth, neither have we laid tribute on other countries as did earlier civilizations.

The word "education" sometimes stands for idleness, but The American Philosophy symbols work, effort, industry. It means intelligent, thoughtful, reasonable and wise busy-ness—helping yourself by helping others. Only the busy person is happy.

The world's greatest prizes in the future will go to the businessman.

The businessman is our only scientist, and to him we must look for a Science of Economics that will readicate poverty, disease, superstition and all that dissipates and destroys.

It is a great man who focuses on his business and instead of putting the whole world straight looks after just one individual, and that is the man right under your own "Stetson."

A Business General

JOHN B. STETSON was a business general. He did his work through other men. He knew the business of hatting, and he knew the human heart better. He knew the consumer and the dealer, and he knew the workmen who manipulated raw stock into forms of use and beauty. ¶ He knew how to captain these workers

for his own advantage and benefit—and theirs. He knew how to transform indifferent, slipshod, faulty, foolish human clay into men of worth. He knew how to take a man who was not a friend to himself, and by being a friend to him, make of him a man of integrity.

¶ To influence an individual who does not know how to economize his own time, or save his money over against the day of storm, and make of this man an economist who will save his money and buy a home and pay for it and have money in the savings-bank, and conserve his health so as to enjoy his treasures of books and music and flowerbeds and vegetable-garden, and to be on good terms with his neighbors, and best of all with himself—to appreciate Nature and all the manifold beauties of this wondrous world, this was one of the achievements of John B. Stetson, done over and over again.

¶ From the very first Stetson was a stickler for quality. He believed in his goods, and refused absolutely to compete in the matter of price.

So far as I can ascertain, he was the first man in the hat business to adopt the one-price system; and for forty-five years the prices on Stetson's hats have remained the same. Materials and wages have all very much advanced, but to meet this advance, scientific economics have been introduced in the way of manufacture that equalized increased cost of raw stock and labor.

Always and forever the price has been the same; and no man, no matter how much money he had, even in the darkest financial hours that Stetson ever saw, could buy a hat a penny cheaper.

Stetson believed in himself and he believed in his goods, and he had the supreme faith that the public would eventually come to him.

¶ John B. Stetson was one of the great organizers of the world. All men who succeeded in a masterly way owe their success to their ability to manage and control the efforts of other people.

Napoleon succeeded through his marshals, and this fact he made no effort to conceal. He bound men to him with hoops of steel. He fired them with his own enthusiasm and filled them with his own purpose. He loved them and they loved him. Bertrand followed

his master into exile at Saint Helena, and was servant of the man who once ruled the world until this man passed away. Bertrand, remaining on the spot, guarding the grave, refusing to leave Saint Helena even when the master had turned to dust, gives us an object-lesson in loyalty that we can never forget.

When Sir Humphry Davy was asked to name his greatest and most important discovery, he thought an instant and then answered, "Michael Faraday."

If I were asked to name the greatest discovery of John B. Stetson, I would say, "James Howell Cummings."

It is unfair to compare one great man with another, because every superior man is an individual. God never duplicates. But the loyalty of Cummings for Stetson is the loyalty of Bertrand for Napoleon.

¶ However, it is not a loyalty to a lost cause or to the memory alone of greatness gone. It is something far more difficult than that. An executive has been described as a man who decides quickly and is sometimes right. The real fact is that he has to be right fifty-one per cent of the time, and more.

Cummings was born in the little village of Goshen, Pennsylvania, in the year Eighteen Hundred Sixty-seven. The lad received a public-school education and passed through the high school with honors, and at fifteen years of age entered the employ of the Stetson Company as errand-boy.

Marshall Field once said that if he wanted to pick a boy who would take up his work and eclipse his record, he would select a youth who left school at fifteen, whose father was dead, and who had a mother and brothers and sisters to care for.

Young Cummings was not a Bertrand; he was more. He was the Corsican. He had the same hungry desire to know, the quick intuition, the tireless grasp of detail, and the ability to swim with the tide and not get drowned in a multiplicity of items.

Like Napoleon, Cummings is slight in stature, athletic, and uses all the body he possesses. He has the ability to work long and hard, to laugh and play, to run and enjoy, and thus he gets his rest in

change. He takes his vacation every day, and so he never needs one, and is always in a mood to enjoy one.

From errand-boy he became clerk, then assistant manager; and in Eighteen Hundred Ninety-one when he was twenty-four years of age he was made Secretary of the great corporation.

Then he became Treasurer, then Second Vice-President; and in Nineteen Hundred Six when the Chief passed away, Cummings glided by divine right into the position of President of the John B. Stetson Company. For five years he had been hands, feet, ears and eyes for John B. Stetson. He had been manager de facto.

Cummings had the respect and love of every department head. It was civil service carried to its logical end. Cummings knew the mind of Stetson better than Stetson had known it himself. Cummings at twenty-four had the prophetic vision. He had been disciplined by Fate, and Nature had supplied him with the ability to learn in silence and to accept what he could not change.

Cummings never looked for slights or insults, or thought of having a good time. The business was his first love. He became a part of it, and since he became President of the institution he has made no attempt to change the name of the concern from "Stetson" to "Cummings." He reverences the memory of the great man gone. He is not in evidence except when needed. He is a man who early learned how to take orders, and he now knows how to give them.

¶ I would say that the chief characteristics of James Howell Cummings are summed up in the following-named qualities: loyalty, good-cheer, economy, faith, energy, industry, modesty, a restless ambition and a noble discontent.

Cummings is never quite satisfied. Everything must be made better. He is always willing to learn; and while he has little patience with the individual who springs a suggestion in order to divert attention from one that has already been made, and the genus kicker is quickly sized up, yet the most lowly helper in this entire army of five thousand people and more can always reach him and will receive a patient and kindly hearing if there is something to be said. Cummings gives

small credit to himself for this great success. He says he owes it all to the people who make the hats, the salesmen and the wise and intelligent dealers who sell them.

Cummings has sympathy, but it is not of the maudlin sort. "Forget yourself in your work," is his motto; and so he is a happy, healthy, grateful, gentle Colossus of business.

Under the management of Mr. Cummings, the John B. Stetson Company, already the largest business of its kind in the world, has not only continued in this proud position, but has doubled the volume of its output.

William F. Fray

WILLIAM F. FRAY is Vice-President of the institution. Mr. Fray has gotten a lot of fun out of his work—money as well. He is a joker with a wonderful fund of stories—that happened, or did n't, as the case may be. Also, Fray is a worker and a friend of workers. The history of hatting is at his tongue's end. Here is one that he told me, which may be true:

Australia, we hear, is overrun with rabbits. The Government once offered a reward for exterminating the pests. The first rabbits were carried into Australia by a Scotchman with red hair. He certainly was a genius in spite of his color-scheme. Fray says he had freckles. In any event, the Scotchman carried two rabbits as pets to Australia.

¶ In five years, Fray says, this Scotchman was the owner of ten million rabbits—the natural result of geometrical progression. As smart, however, as was the Scotchman, his scheme did not exactly work out. What the Scotchman wanted to do was to raise rabbits for the fur, so as to manufacture felt for Tam-o'-Shanters, spats and breeks. The rabbits in Scotland had a beautiful, deep, soft fur; but in a few generations in Australia the fur took on a totally different quality and evolved rather in hair.

The climate of Australia was of a kind that took care of bunny without a fur overcoat; and while the Scotchman had the rabbits all right he did not get the fur. So the only rabbit-skins that can now be used for fur come from the North, or the land of cold and snow.

Albert T. Freeman

IT was the fixed policy of John B. Stetson that no individual in an institution was necessary to the success of the concern. ¶ His idea was that the organization should be so complete that any one man, from president to janitor, could drop out and his presence not be missed.

In order to show a man that he was not necessary, Mr. Stetson used to send certain individuals away on vacations. This would prove to the rest that the work could go on just as well. And in fact, if ever a man got it fixed in his mind that he was absolutely necessary to the business, he ran a pretty good risk of being dropped out entirely ☸ ☸

The understudy to Mr. Cummings is Albert T. Freeman.

Mr. Freeman has the Stetson spirit in every particular. He came into the Stetson factory twelve years ago under rather peculiar conditions. Stetson met Freeman and liked the young man so well that he employed him to come on to Philadelphia and enter the office ☸ From the first Freeman showed such marked ability that Stetson allowed him to gravitate to where he belonged.

The man who can shoulder burdens is always needed, and Freeman exhibited a fine aptitude for taking care of difficult and complex propositions that needed readjustment.

Freeman was born in the little village of Penfield, Monroe County, New York. He was one of a family of nine children—the father, a Baptist preacher, “passing rich on forty pounds a year.” It is a great blessing to be born into such a family, where soft luxury is absolutely out of the equation, but where there is an earnest desire to improve every opportunity for good.

The recipe for educating your children is: Educate yourselves ☸ Freeman’s parents were educated folks; and good health and a hunger for knowledge were the young man’s sole inheritances ☸ From the village school to the High School, and then to Rochester University, was a natural evolution. Then came a post-graduate course at the University of Chicago, with a turn at teaching—and

the rest followed. Mr. Freeman is now Vice-President and General Manager of the Stetson business.

I once heard Mr. Cummings say, "Blessed is that man who has found some one to do his work," and Freeman was in his mind. When, in Eighteen Hundred Ninety-one, the Stetson business was incorporated, Mr. Stetson provided for the interests of his lieutenants and older employees by assigning them portions of the stock.

¶ With the large later growth there was a natural infusion of new blood, and he sought some plan to give the younger men who had shown their value to the business, a direct interest in its profit.

¶ With this in mind, in Nineteen Hundred Two, a new issue of five thousand shares of Common Stock was set aside to be assigned at the discretion of the President, to employees. Unlike other stock participation by employees, no payment was required or permitted. Stock was issued to trustees for the employees to be paid for at par out of its dividends. These dividends, since the inauguration of the plan, have been not less than twenty per cent per year. The stock is thus full paid in about five years, after which time the employee receives the full benefit of ownership of the stock, except that he is not permitted to dispose of it. At the end of a fifteen-year period of trusteeship, the stock is assigned absolutely to the employee. Absolute transfer is also made, in the meantime, in the case of death or incapacity of the employee.

If, on the other hand, the employee is discharged or leaves, he receives the actual amount paid up on the stock.

As the market value of the stock is about four hundred dollars a share, there is, obviously, a strong material inducement to maintain the loyalty and interest of the employee. It is a splendid plan for insuring permanency.

Through the operation of the stock-allotment plan and by other means, a large proportion of the adult employees of the Company have become directly interested in the profits of the business by stock ownership.

Nearly thirteen thousand shares, of a market value of more than five

million dollars, are now owned by persons actively engaged in the business of the John B. Stetson Company. This can not truthfully be said of any other big corporation in the world.

The factory floor space of The John B. Stetson Company covers more than twenty-eight acres. Here nearly six thousand hands are employed. The entire round world is scoured for materials. When I talked with one of the head men in the manufacturing department, who has been with the business for nearly forty years, in the course of the conversation he threw out a grave wonder as to whether there were any fur-bearing animals along the canal-banks of Mars.

A remarkable feature of the Stetson business is the general and wide distribution of the product, the hats being sold throughout the world in every country in which hats are worn. No other trade-marked article of merchandise that I know of is so widely distributed.

¶ Stetson hats are sold by one hundred fifty wholesale merchants and more than ten thousand retail merchants. Of the latter, one thousand one hundred twenty-four are in foreign countries.

The largest foreign markets of Stetson hats are Argentine Republic, Mexico, Canada, South Africa and Europe.

The materials for Stetson hats are brought from many parts of the world, but the manufactured hats go to a greater number of countries.

The vogue of the Stetson hat is thus not in its exclusiveness so far as the merchant is concerned, but in the strong hold with the consumer which its quality has secured, and in the desire of the merchant to satisfy this public demand, regardless of whether other merchants are also handling the same goods.

The John B. Stetson Company is always striving to make the best, better. Nothing is too good for a "Stetson" wearer, a "Stetson" dealer or a "Stetson" worker.




This great business has more of this spirit of brotherhood than any other big business I can now recall. The Stetson spirit regards business as opportunity—not mere opportunity to make money, but also the opportunity to educate, bless, benefit, uplift and add to the joys of the world.

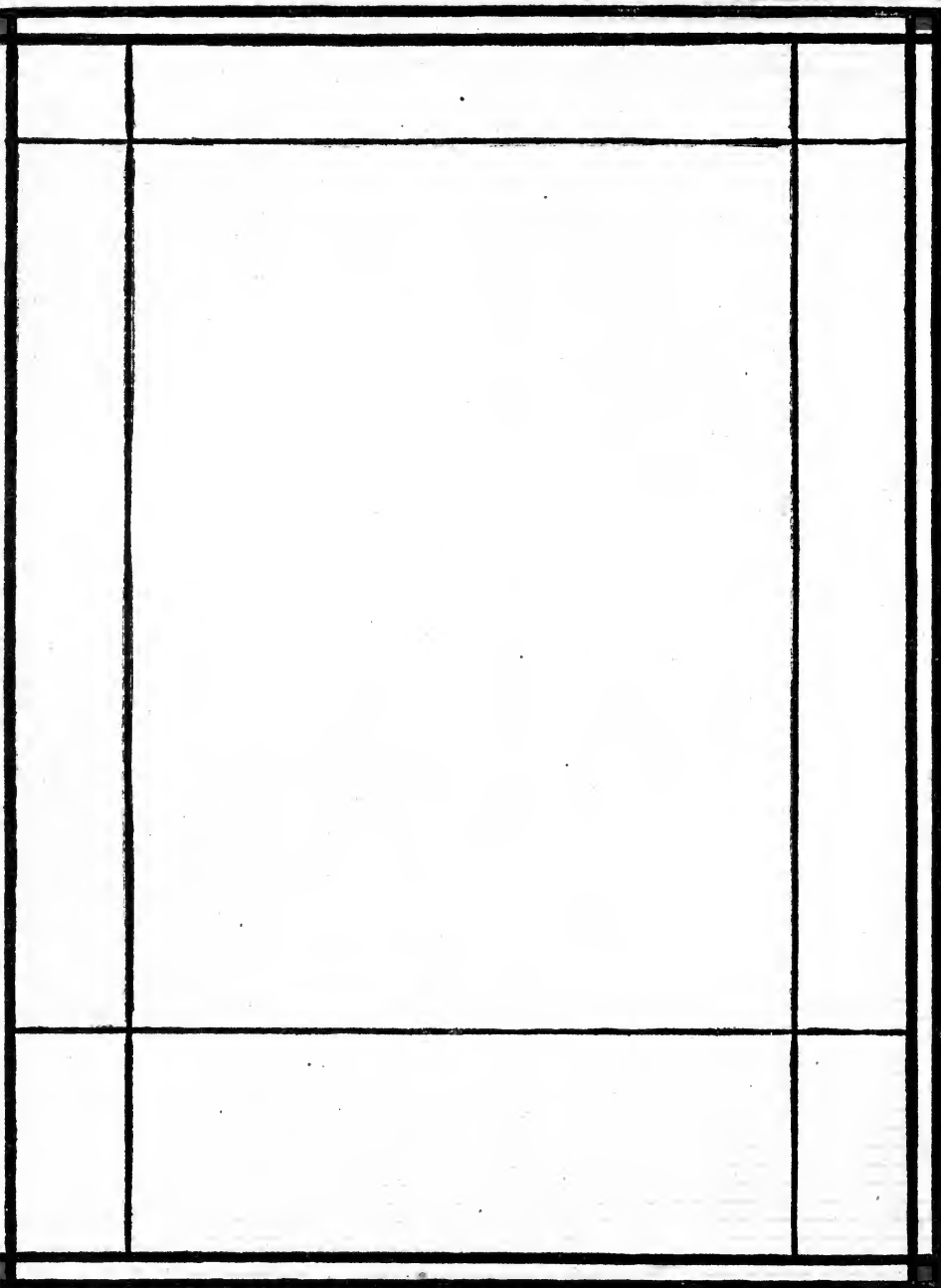


JAMES HOWELL CUMMINGS



CIVILIZATION

turns on Organization; *and*
Organization,
in order to be
of any value,
must be Scientific   



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